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SUBJECT: PART 3 OF 3: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SOUTH AFRICA'S
NEW PRESIDENT

PRETORIA 00000954 001.2 OF 004

Summary

11. (SBU) This is the third of three messages that aim to reveal a comprehensive background picture of Jacob Zuma, the President of the ruling African National Congress party (ANC), who was inaugurated as the fourth post-apartheid president of South Africa. The first message was released before Zuma was inaugurated, and the last two will be released following his ascendancy. End Summary.

Zuma Destined for Greatness

12. (SBU) The global emergence of the anti-apartheid and disinvestment movements gained momentum in the 1970s and the 1980's, such that even the USG adopted a sanctions policy against the apartheid regime. Under international diplomatic, political, military, and economic pressure, the SAG decided that apartheid was no longer sustainable. Negotiations with Nelson Mandela, who was serving a life sentence in Robben Island, opened the door for his release from prison and the un-banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other opposition and anti-apartheid political parties. When SAG President F.W. de Klerk un-banned the ANC in 1990, Jacob Zuma, the ANC's Intelligence and Security chief in exile, was one of the first high level ANC operatives to return to South Africa. Zuma immediately became involved in negotiations concerned with dismantling apartheid laws and governance, facilitating the repatriation of those in exile, as well as the release of all political prisoners. It was between 1990 and 1994 that Zuma achieved his most important success: negotiating an end to the spiral of violence between the ANC and the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) -- that believed in Zulu tradition and primacy -- and resulted in thousands of politically-related deaths. Zuma is likely the most prominent ANC Zulu politician -- even eclipsing Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Moreover, his own Zulu ethnicity and identity was a major asset, convincing the Zulus of KwaZulu Natal to support the ANC's leadership, the new ANC constitution, and reconciliation as he urged a non-violent way for the opposing political movements to communicate. Though sporadic outbreaks of Zulu-ANC violence occurred up until 2009, the intensity, frequency, and number of deaths have reduced to a very small fraction compared to the early 1990s. This achievement

remains one of the most important bases for Zuma's stature, popularity and support among the ANC rank and file.

13. (SBU) For the decades of his imprisonment, Mandela was the most recognized icon of the ANC as well as a global symbol of freedom, perseverance, and resistance to apartheid. Upon his release, he led the ANC's efforts to create a majority-based, multi-racial democratic system founded on a progressive constitution based on democratic best practices around the world. In the period before the end of apartheid following the 1994 election which made Mandela the first democratically-elected president of South Africa, Zuma was appointed to key roles in the ANC and participated in their political decisions and negotiations. In 1994, his supporters say, he stepped aside so that Thabo Mbeki could stand unopposed as Mandela's Deputy President. He had one unsuccessful campaign to become the premier of KwaZulu Natal and in 1994 was appointed the Deputy Premier of that province by his old comrade and sometimes adversary Thabo Mbeki. Between 1994 and 1996, Zuma was KwaZulu Natal's provincial chairman of the ANC as well as MEC for Economic Development and Tourism. In 1996, he was re-elected as Chair of the ANC in KwaZulu Natal and the same year became the ANC's National Chairperson -- one of the top six jobs in the party.

14. (SBU) His highest office -- prior to his current status as President-elect of South Africa following a vote in Parliament on May 6, 2009 -- was ANC Deputy President and Member of Parliament, as he served as Deputy State President in the Mbeki Administration from 1999 to 2005. Upon attaining the party Deputy Presidency, by tradition of succession in the ANC, Zuma was believed to be Mbeki's heir apparent, destined to succeed to the presidency in his time. But there were bumps in the road. He served as an unofficial

PRETORIA 00000954 002.2 OF 004

peace mediator and diplomatic troubleshooter in the region (Zimbabwe, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and helped the ANC build a rapport with trade unions, traditional leaders, and other political parties. Zuma developed the reputation of being humble, charismatic, loyal, hard-working, and committed to improving the lives of South Africans. In 1999, based on this profile, he was appointed Deputy President of the ANC and became the Deputy President of South Africa in the first Mbeki administration. He was dismissed by Mbeki as SAG Deputy President in 2005 as a result of being implicated in the corruption trial of his friend and financial advisor Schabir Shaik. In 2006, he was charged with rape of a family friend, but was acquitted. Following Shaik's conviction of bribing Zuma for personal gain, Zuma was indicted and charged with multiple counts of corruption, accepting bribes, tax evasion, and money laundering.

15. (SBU) Zuma's rise to the pinnacle of South African politics at the same time that serious questions about his character were headline news is an astonishing political achievement in itself. Zuma is known as a populist whose rise occurred in partnership with leftist constituencies in the ANC. Despite criminal allegations against him, he remained popular in the party, unlike Mbeki who came to be hated. Zuma is particularly popular among Zulu ethnic and Youth Leagues; their defense of him claims he has served the people well, there are others worse than him, and he is much better than Mbeki. Some of his most ardent supporters promised to kill and die for him while others threatened that if Zuma were to be convicted, "blood would flow" and they would make the country "ungovernable." To them, Zuma had a "right" to be president. Mbeki believed that a Zuma presidency would be a disaster for South Africa and would split the ANC. Zuma's supporters counter-claimed that Mbeki was a disaster for the poor and he was the one splitting the party, creating a strong presidency that acted without reference to party instruction. In 2007, well after the conviction of his friend Shaik for bribery and corruption,

Zuma was also indicted for having a corrupt relationship with Shaik. The charges were set aside in September 2008 due to lack of preparedness by the prosecutors to proceed with the case.

¶16. (SBU) Despite Mbeki's intellect and experience as well as his apparent success as a leader, politician, and diplomat, Zuma out-maneuvered him by manipulating the party base through the district offices and portraying himself as the victim via the image-making machinery of the ANC. Pundits thought Mbeki was the smartest and most effective political leader of his generation, but on December 17, 2007 in Polokwane, Limpopo, the ANC declared Zuma the clear favorite, beginning Mbeki's surprising slide into political obscurity. Days following his election, corruption charges were re-filed against Zuma, causing a leadership crisis in the ANC that was only resolved in September 2008 when the Zuma-led NEC forced Mbeki to resign as President of South Africa -- a deliberate act of triumphant revenge just eight months short of the end of his second five year term. Kgalema Motlanthe (septel), Qof his second five year term. Kgalema Motlanthe (septel), the ANC Deputy President, was sworn in as South Africa's third post-apartheid president, but his seven month tenure was purposefully that of a care-taker, marking time until the president in waiting took office.

¶17. (SBU) Following a year-and-a-half of controversial high profile court challenges, appeals, and counter-suits, all charges against Zuma were dropped only weeks before the election in April 2009. His supporters' adoration only grew as his detractors characterized him as an unlettered and corrupt buffoon surrounded by crass and intimidating socialist sycophants. Zuma loyalists ignored critiques that he is a charismatic populist and political chameleon who tells each audience exactly what they want to hear, that he is a man without his own vision or policy center. His supporters understand that Zuma has one over-riding policy -- loyalty to the ANC and improving the lives of the rural poor above all else.

Keys To Zuma's Personality

PRETORIA 00000954 003.2 OF 004

¶18. (SBU) Zuma has clearly weathered numerous storms during recent years and he used several tactics of political survival that give clues to his personality and leadership style. First, he used the power of persuasion to build strong alliances. Faced with enormous challenges to his political career, Zuma built a strong support team and pulled his family close to him. He also relied heavily on his contacts in KwaZulu Natal. Second, he leveraged on the infrastructure and networks of his friends. The perceived political conspiracy against Zuma became a reality in the minds of many South Africans -- including Pietermaritzburg High Court Judge Chris Nicholson -- and this triggered a groundswell of sympathy for him. The ANC Youth League, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Communist Party (SACP) gave him a political platform to express his views. He also worked closely with business people who had local and international networks. They extended their influence so he could counter the negative images that his adversaries had built of him. Third, he remained focused on key tasks. Throughout the political crisis he faced after Mbeki fired him, Zuma focused on his oft-repeated assertion that he was innocent and that he was the victim of a systematic abuse of power. Fourth, Zuma understood that the main thrust of the political conspiracy would have been to remove him from the ANC, and the ANC from him. His best response would be to live the values of the ANC throughout the crisis period, and become the epitome of an ANC cadre -- which he did. He built extensive relationships in Parliament and with ANC branches across the country. As he began to live the values of the

ANC, the ruling party found it more difficult to distance itself from him.

¶9. (SBU) Fifth, Zuma delegated effectively while never abandoning his responsibilities. Zuma is outstanding at delegating jobs to those around him. According to those closest to Zuma, "his demeanor in the face of adversity helped to create a positive atmosphere inside his war-rooms."

Sixth, he always maintained the moral high ground and remained authentic throughout. No matter how hard detractors tried to break his spirit by name-calling and leaking information, Zuma never lost his composure. In the midst of his toughest times, Zuma visited his working-class supporters and the unemployed. Seventh, he improvised his communication methods -- and found success doing so. When he realized that much of the media in South Africa was against him becoming the next leader, he resorted to positive imagery. He became the dignified underdog, and he painted those against him as shameless bullies and cowards. Last, Zuma used smart aggression as a tool to wear down his opponents. Throughout the most difficult times of the past few years, Zuma came across as reluctant to draw first blood, only displaying subtle determination to take the fight to his aggressors. This is consistent with a leader that is aware of his own strengths -- smart power.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) As Zuma's presidency begins, many outstanding questions remain about his government and his policies. His close association with the ideological left of the ANC Qclose association with the ideological left of the ANC alliance has raised some worries about the impact on economic policy by close Zuma allies in the SACP and COSATU. He has reassured investors their assets will be secure under his administration, but has also called for the redistribution of wealth in the interests of the poor. The ANC has led the world to expect a more intimate intertwining of the ruling party and the state as well as a deployment of public officials whose standard of conduct and effectiveness will be their loyalty to Zuma and the ANC and their willingness to carry out ANC policies. With a relatively weak opposition but respected courts and activist civil society, there is optimism that a Zuma administration will, at worst, muddle through. There are many top performers in the ANC, and the ANC tradition of collective decision-making will define the policy context of the Zuma administration. One can only guess how South Africa will evolve under a Zuma presidency -- which he promises will only be for one term. South Africans have suffered many more and greater tragedies than an elected government with a near two-thirds majority. It is trite to

PRETORIA 00000954 004.2 OF 004

say, but "time will tell." In this case, such a statement rings true for South Africa in 2009.
LA LIME